MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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Vol. IV

MARCH, 1943

No. 1

John Derstine Souder 1865—1942

MENNONITE HISTORIAN

JOHN C. WENGER

One of the most active local historians of the Mennonite Church was the late John D. Souder of Telford, Pennsylvania. Born in Rockhill township, Bucks county, on March 4, 1865, he came of an old Franconia family. The parents of John D. Souder were John Nice and Mary Gehman Derstine Souder, members of the Franconia congregation of the Franconia Conference. Following the death of Mary Derstine Souder, John N. married her sister, Esther Derstine. John D. always spoke appreciatively of his step-mother. Both the Souder and Derstine families were large. When John was a lad in the Indian Field country school he listed his

aunts and uncles and found that he had a total of thirty, and one hundred thirty first cousins. At the age of seventy-five he reported that only thirteen first cousins were still alive and three of them were nearing ninety years

of age.

At the age of six John D. Souder moved with his family to the farm where he died, a property just across the road from the Indian Creek Reformed Church. Most of his life he was a farmer and dealer in fancy poultry, although he did carry mail for fourteen years, as well as operate a store for some years in the village of Telford. He also served

as the Telford postmaster for several years during McKinley's administration. On February 5, 1887, he was married to Sallie G. Alderfer, who lived happily with him for fifty years. Three sons (Preston, Mahlon, and Raymond) and two daughters (Florence, Mrs. Harvey F. Keller, and Edna, Mrs. Herbert Kulp) survived him, while several infants preceded him in death (Charles, Wilmer, Howard, and

Already as a youth of twenty John D. Souder took an active interest in local history, writing a series of articles on the history of his township. These articles were published in book form in 1886 at Harleysville, Pennsylvania, entitled *History of Franconia Township*. One of the

schoolteachers of John was Samuel R. Swartley of Lansdale, Pennsylvania, a man some years his senior but still living. It is possible that the influence of Swartley played a part in the intellectual awakening of John D. Souder. In any case it is said that as a boy he was inclined to lie on his stomach on the floor and read, omnivorously we may well believe. For some years after his marriage, which took place in his twenty-second year, he was undoubtedly concerned mainly with earning a livelihood for his growing family. But his keen mind was ever alert to the ordinary things about him. In his later years he turned more and more to local history. He collected books, clipped newspaper articles of historical interest, attended historical meetings of all kinds, joined the "Pennsylvania German Society," wrote historical scrap books, and longed to see someone write the history of the Men-



John D. Souder at Work on Illuminated Manuscripts

nonites of his conference district. He collected numerous notes on the project himself, but never felt qualified as a trained historian and literary man to undertake the actual writing. When the first officers of his regional church historical society were appointed in 1930 he was named chairman. When he died almost twelve years later he was still president of the "Franconia Mennonite Historical Society"

For many years he used to make drawings of birds in various colors of ink and present the picture cards to the children of his friends and of his Sunday school. Shortly before the death of his wife (December, 1937) he made a drawing in colors

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John S. Coffman 1848—1899

MENNONITE EVANGELIST FLOYD A. SHANK

John S. Coffman was born in Rockingham county, Virginia, October 16, 1848. His parents, Samuel and Frances Weaver Coffman, were Mennonites of German descent. His father was an active and capable Mennonite minister and bishop in the Middle District of the Mennonite Conference of Virginia. Before John S. Coffman was born, his mother definitely dedicated the unborn child to the Lord. At the time of his birth she had a very definite spiritual witness that God had accepted the consecration.

John grew up as a mild-tempered "mother's boy." Because he was the eldest child, his needed services at home pre-

vented him in his early youth from going to school as much as he desired. When a Mennonite, David A. Heatwole, opened a private school, conducting day and evening classes in the neighborhood, John was given more school opportunity and became an exceptional student. In the summer of 1864, one evening while in the orchard, conviction seized him and he was convinced he needed salvation. Under this burden he knelt by a tree and prayed for salvation and God answered him. On July 4 of the same year, then sixteen years of age, he was baptized in Muddy Creek and became a member of the Mennon-

As a youth he tried to use every opportunity for learning. He borrowed books from Dr. Bucher of Bridgewater Normal. Dr. Bucher was so much impressed with this young man's eagerness to learn that he refused to accept any pay for the use of his books. Young Coffman took the teacher's examinations, and upon passing began teaching public school. He was also greatly interested in music and taught private singing schools. On November 11, 1869, he married Elizabeth Heatwole. He added to his teaching duties the occupation of farming. Yet all the while he continued to pursue his studies. He was reputed as being "one of the liviest teachers in the county." As

a young man he was dignified, friendly, him respect and friendship everywhere. Travel Notes of Samuel serious-minded, conscientious, industrious.

July 18, 1875, John S. Coffman was ordained in the Mennonite Church to the ministry. His very first sermon showed a marked departure from the traditional sing-song, extemporaneous preaching. He had a definite conviction for the ministry and applied himself diligently to the study of the Bible. He outlined his sermons and preached with energy and persuasiveness. People liked to hear him. Though he respected the feelings of the older brethren, he was still courageous for the Lord.

J. S. Coffman accepted a call to become assistant editor of the Herald of Truth, and in 1879 moved to Elkhart, Indiana, where the paper was published. His services as a minister were also greatly appreciated by the Mennonite congregation at Elkhart. Especially during his early labors at Elkhart he had a growing conviction that special evangelistic efforts should be made for the gathering in of Mennonite young people, many of whom were being lost to Christ and the church. He had a conviction that he should take up evangelistic work himself. However, since the leaders in many parts of the church looked with disfavor upon holding a series of evangelistic meetings, he fasted and prayed much concerning this burden.

In June, 1881, the congregation at Bowne, Michigan, in need of spiritual help, called Coffman to come and spend some time with them. After he had preached the first few sermons, seeing that the interest was good, he continued preaching night after night for a week. Nine souls confessed Christ and the congregation experienced a great reviving. This was his first series of meetings, and one of the earliest in the Mennonite Church. J. N. Durr, pastor of the Mennonite congregation at Masontown, Pennsylvania, hearing of the revival in Michigan, invited Coffman to conduct a series of evangelistic meetings at his church. This he did in December, 1881, with the visible result of twelve souls being received into the church. The news of the activities of the pioneer Mennonite evangelist soon spread far and wide. Some Mennonites criticized, others wanted to hear him. Wide-awake ministers, realizing the need of a revival, invited this young evangelist to conduct series of meetings in their congregations. John S. Coffman soon found himself busily engaged in the work for which he had such a great burden. From east to west, from north to south among the Mennonite and Amish congregations he was called. Scores and hundreds of souls were won to Christ and dozens of congregations were set aglow with spirituality. Probably his greatest revival was the one among the congregations in Ontario, Canada, in 1891, where over one hundred souls were won for Christ. While laboring there he is reported to have spent at times the greater part of nights in prayer.

John S. Coffman was well qualified for the work of an evangelist. His dignified, alert, warm, friendly personality won for Simons.

He had a fair education, a rich background of human associations, and a sympathetic interest in the welfare of others. He had a definite conversion experience, knew that he was saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, and had witnessed the power of God in his own life and in the lives of others. He knew the Word of God and was able to preach it with conviction and power. A great passion for souls burned in his heart which caused him to spend long hours with God in prayer.

The work of John S. Coffman as an evangelist cannot be measured simply by the great number of souls whom he led to Christ. He was able to reach and win some of the more talented young men who later became leaders in the Mennonite Church and have done much toward remodeling it after Coffman's spiritual mind. Among his converts who later became ordained leaders in the church should be mentioned: Daniel Kauffman, George R. Brunk, Tillman Erb, J. M. R. Weaver, Jos. C. Driver, N. O. Blosser, M. S. Steiner, J. B. Smith, L. J. Lehman, and E. S. Hallman. S. F. Coffman. D. H. Bender, J. A. Ressler, and Aaron Loucks are among the Christian young men whose lives were challenged by Coffman and whose services were directed into the Mennonite Church to help make it a spiritual, evangelistic body.

The life of John S. Coffman made many contributions besides evangelism. In addition to being the first editor of Mennonite Sunday-school lesson helps, his life and teaching gave the then weak Sundayschool movement in the Mennonite Church great impetus. The origin of mission work and young people's meetings in the Mennonite Church can be traced in a large way to his advocacy. John S. Coffman is the man who was personally responsible for making Elkhart Institute a Mennonite Institution founded upon Biblical principles, and therefore he is the founder of higher education in the (Old) Mennonite Church of America. Besides all his work for the church he also found time to spend with his seven children and fine Christian wife, reading and praying with them and leading them in the way of the Lord.

John S. Coffman was a man who toiled on in the way he believed God was directing, regardless of hindrances and opposition. Though he was diplomatic and had hundreds of friends inside and outside the Mennonite Church, he was constantly laboring under criticism and opposition from ultra-conservative leaders. He was a pioneer in every sense of the word. His entire life was devoted to breaking open spiritual trails over which others could carry on the work in larger dimensions. John S. Coffman died at his home at Elkhart, Indiana, July 22, 1899. He burned out his life at the early age of fifty years.

For true evangelical faith is of such nature that it can not be workless or idle; it ever manifests its powers.-Menno

Godshalk

EDITED BY JOHN C. WENGER (Continued from Dec. 1942, issue) 4. To ONTARIO

Took the train for Kalamazoo; on to Detroit. Crossed into Canada at Port Huron at 6:00 [May 18]. Reached Hamburg at 4:00 p.m. Spent the night at Abram Cressman's.

May 19. Took dinner at George Smith's. Visited with Preacher [Moses S.] Bowman and spent the night with him.

May 20 [Thursday]. Attended the meeting at "Latshaw's" [Latschars] near Bowman's home. "Waterloo has 19 meeting houses and 4 branch houses which they tend. They go at times 80 miles to visit those places." Took dinner at David Eshleman's, and supper with Widow Cressman. Spent the night at Minister Jacob Hallman's.

May 21. We went to the meeting at Blenheim's. Dinner at Joseph Hallman's. [The diary indicates that in 1869 "old man Hallman" was quite helpless due to the infirmities of old age, apparently.] Some Blenheim members have joined the Dunkards.

May 22. Went to Detweiler's meeting. Here we met a niece of Jacob Histand | of the Franconia Conference?]. The preachers of this meeting are Henry Shantz and E[noch] Detweiler, and John Detweiler is deacon. We went to Shantz's for dinner, and to Minister John Stoeckle's for supper. Spent the night at Jacob Shoemaker's.

May 23 [Sunday]. Went to the meeting at David Eby's, then to his house for dinner. To Brother Snyder's for the night.

May 24. Went to Martin's meeting. Took dinner with Brother John Martin, father of Bishop [Abraham] Martin. "It looks here as much like Lancaster county as any place I saw; the climate is colder, is all the difference.'

Took supper with David Horst then went to Bishop Abraham Martin's.

May 25. Bishop Martin and son took us to meeting. On the way we went by St. Jacobs, crossed the Conestoga twice and followed it a short distance. From the meeting we went to Brother John B. Brubaker, "where he commenced in the woods," when he came here from Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, as did "many of the brethren." His son, Michael M., lives with him.

Waterloo County is settled with Scotch and Germans. "The Mennonites seem warm and inclined to humility and the old fundamentals of the church. There was a great flood in Canada on the 26th of April such as the old settlers never [saw] here."

Spent the night with Samuel Weber who has 600 acres of land. On the way to his home we stopped with a Brother Rock for over an hour and also called on a sick person named Martin.

May 26. Attended the Snyder meeting. Took dinner with Henry Overholt who settled here 36 years ago. After calling on Brother Jacob Schantz we

took supper with Moses Erb, a minister. Spent the night with Daniel Wismer.

May 27. Wismer took us to the Snyder meeting. We went to Brother Joseph Heagy's for dinner and to George Clemens' for supper. Spent the night at Christ Snyder's. Under the blessings of God the Canadian Mennonites have prospered financially: "Now some look up [with pride] where [as] they should humble themselves, and be very thankful and walk in the footsteps of Christ."

May 27. Went to conference and passed through Berlin [Kitchener now]; left the team at William Meyer's. Meyer gave me a Testament from Overholt's bookstore in Berlin. "It seems to me those brethren are too wealthy; they have a great reason to humble themselves."

The conference discussed receiving those brethren that went with the so-called Overholt people. "After a long debate rather decided to take them in [as] ministers without casting [a] lot, if the church is willing to accept of them in this way. I fear they will not prosper in this way. . . . I like our way better."

The order of the conference meeting was as follows: 1. Singing; 2. Prayer; 3. "Business"; 4. Prayer; and 5. Singing.

The settlers have shot and ate many deer. The wolves used to be hard on the deer and on sheep. The settlers used to catch wolves in traps, and kill them with forks, guns and dogs "without mercy..."

May 29. [Saturday]. Cloudy. Passed through Berlin again. Visited Isaac Hunsicker who is ill. Called on Henry Benner [?] and took dinner with Abraham Meyer. Attended the Preparatory Service at Eby's. Took supper at Michael Hunsicker's; they live in Berlin. Then went to Joseph Snyder's.

May 30. [Sunday]. To meeting in the morning. "They tell me some don't keep the preparatory day; think it something new." The morning service was a communion service. Joseph Heagy is the bishop. Attended meeting in the afternoon at "Heagy's" [Hagey's] meeting [house]. Visited Jacob Heagy. Went with Brother Shenk to the Preston depot.

May 31. Went to "Gall" [Gault]. Changed "cars" [trains] at Harrisburg. "Passed the head of Lake Ontario." Reached Jordan at 11 o'clock. "I now am anxious to see Til Moyer; he is sick." Took dinner at Jacob High's. "Then he took us to Tilman Meyer, and found him quite smart."

June 1. "Slept sweet at Br[other] T. Moyer. Received our first letter here; it was a great consolation. It was Sarah's. Four more [were] sent to Waterloo which I did not get there. I would have given 50 cts. apiece for them. . . ." Took dinner with Deacon Abrm. Kratz. "I think this is the heart of Canada." Took supper with Isaac, son of Deacon Kratz. Spent the night at Henry Meyer's.

(To be concluded)

JOHN DERSTINE SOUDER

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to commemorate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. The death of his life companion was a blow from which he suffered keenly. As time went on he seemed to mourn intensely. Partly in an effort to entertain himself he took up his pen and ink and started to copy the old Pennsylvania German art designs. These illuminated manuscripts he worked on day after day, copying designs from school awards of bygone days, hymnbook inscriptions, artistic Bible verses, and even earthen table plates. Some of these Fraktur-Schriften he copied accurately, while others he modified to suit his own taste. By the time he was seventy-five years of age he had made four hundred drawings or art designs, and by the time of his death (at seventy-seven) the number had grown to 1,000. These were placed on exhibition at the New York Metropolitan Museum. Specimens of his work are also found in the Mennonite Historical Library of Goshen College.

John D. Souder was a devout member of the Rockhill Mennonite Church, where for many years his brother, Mahlon D. Souder (1859-1924), served as minister. John served as Sunday-school superintendent many years ago. He was president of the cemetery committee, organized in 1920. He was much concerned for the prosperity of the church, favoring that type of discipline which would not drive the finest young people from the church.

He was keen-minded and alert, even in his seventies, always enjoying a little humor. The following extract from a letter written to me on April 19, 1938, indicates something of his spirit: "... I am busy, but I have to wrestle with a 45-year-old head and a 73-year-old body to back my ambition. I thank God for the spiritual ambition, and pray that we all may grow in Grace and the Knowledge which is in Christ Jesus. ..."

The great passion of his life was to see the history of the Mennonites written in a more honest and sympathetic way. This desire was so strong in him that he himself was not always entirely objective. But he knew the Mennonites intimately, was himself a devout member of the group, and he knew that the bulk of the literature about Mennonites was simply not a true picture of them. The preparation for publication of the History of the Mennonites of the Franconia Conference in the years 1935-36 was for him a most happy experience. When the book appeared (1937) he felt that his life's work was done. He had agitated for such a work for a long time, had participated intimately in its production, and lived to see the finished book. Only later did he take up the production of illuminated manuscripts as a major undertaking.

The following tribute appeared in the Souderton [Penna.] Independent on the occasion of his death: "The Independent loses a friend of long standing in the passing of Mr. Souder. His visits to our office were quite frequent in his more do follow him."

NEWS & NOTES

The original diary kept by Preacher Samuel Godshalk is now in the possession of the senior minister of the Franconia Conference, Jacob Rush of the Deep Run Mennonite congregation. The address of Bro. Rush is Plumsteadville, Pennsylvania.

One of the richest sources for Mennonite history research is found in the files of the Herald of Truth, 1864-1908. One finds quite a variety of items in this periodical. For example, in the Herald of June 1, 1882, it is reported that recently the seats were changed, backs were added to them, and the preacher's stand was placed on the southeast side of the Doylestown meetinghouse of the Franconia Conference. The June 15 Herald of the same year reports that Brother Daniel Tschantz (Johns) of the Clinton Church was ordained to the ministry at the communion service on June 4. This same issue also contains an article against church building dedication services by no less a leader than John S. Coffman.

The March issue of the BULLETIN is appearing sufficiently late to report the death of Allen M. Fretz, well known minister of Perkasie, Pennsylvania. He was affiliated with the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America. He passed away on April 26, 1943, at the advanced age of 89 years. He was ordained to the ministry on October 13, 1833. He served as pastor of the Deep Run Congregation for almost sixty years. Rev. Fretz was an active man in his community, having even been nominated by the Republican party for the state legislature many years ago.

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active days and he usually brought with him some new historical findings or pictures. He contributed many articles which were of great reader interest on old barns, trees, stone and covered bridges, cemeteries, landmarks, etc.

"He performed an invaluable service to the community in keeping alive the characteristics of the ancestors whose thoughts and deeds helped shape the destiny of this section and truly it can be said that he was the link in the chain that steadfastly held the past to the present that those who live in the future may have a knowledge of what happened in earlier years."

About the middle of August, 1942, he became bedfast. Could he have written his obituary he would have put down something like this: "John D. Souder who lived long and enjoyed God's goodness all his days, fell asleep in the Lord on September 14, 1942, and after a funeral sermon by Bishop John Lapp was laid to rest in God's burial acre by the old Rockhill Mennonite Meetinghouse. His works de follow him?"

A Review of Dunham's burden the reader who is not familiar with Pennsylvania Dutch accent and expressions. The author also gives us the

GLADYS GRABER

The Trail of the Conestoga, written by Mabel Dunham, is based upon the life of Mennonites who emigrated to Ontario from the Hammer Creek community in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, over one hundred years ago. The early settlers had come to Penn's forest upon the promise that they would never need to take part in war. At the time of the American Revolution the Mennonites began to fear that the new republic would disregard this contract; so a number of families emigrated to Ontario, transforming a wilderness there into a prosperous community in what is now Waterloo county. The chief characters of the story are Sam and Beccy Bricker, with others of their "Freundschaft." Details of early Mennonite home life, church services, architecture, and community life are all vividly portrayed. The emigrants traveled west and north, crossing the Susquehanna River, pushing on across the Allegheny mountains, and finally braving the Niagara River to the "Promised Land" of Canada

Their task was only begun, and hardships lay before them-the forest had to be cleared to make homes, there were wild animals to combat, and in addition to diphtheria and cholera there was homesickness of a very real and painful kind. Illegal land transfers made by an unserupulous agent caused the Mennonites much trouble until Sam Bricker somehow raised the money to pay off the mortgage and obtain a clear title to the sixty thousand acres. The community began to prosper and, after some unpleasant experiences with the government during the War of 1812, the Mennonites continued to live in peace.

As I read through The Trail of the Concstoya there were a few things with which I disagreed. One was the author's idea of the history and extraction of the Mennonites-that they had come in part from the Waldensians. I believe that this is not true according to the most accurate information about the Mennonites. It is not a serious error, but it would have been misleading if this were the only book 1 would ever read about the Mennonites. Another point that I noticed was the author's tendency to portray all the Mennonites as clumsy, helpless, and unsuspecting people who scarcely knew how to manage their affairs and were careless in the handling of their finances. No doubt this was true of some of the people, but as I read this book I was left with the impression that all of these people were that way. It seemed to me just a trifle overdrawn. The attitude toward women is scarcely correct either, e. g., their subordination to the men.

There were many things about this story which I enjoyed. Miss Dunham handled the conversation skillfully, using enough of the dialect to make the chapters interesting, yet not too much to over-

burden the reader who is not familiar with Pennsylvania Dutch accent and expressions. The author also gives us the picture of strong characters—God-fearing, hard-working, earnest pioneers who are at the same time the followers of high ideals, human, and tender without being sentimental.

It was refreshing to read this story of a group of our own church who were willing to re-build their lives and fortunes in the wilderness to maintain their testimony and life of peace.

QUESTION BOX

Who was the first Mennonite young woman to teach in the *public* schools of the United States? Anna M. Beutler taught in McPherson County, Kansas, in the fall of 1880. Was she the first?—M. G.

NEWS AND NOTES

(Concluded from page 3, col. 3)

The BULLETIN editors are happy to publish in this issue several papers written by students in the Mennonite History class at Goshen College. The BULLETIN welcomes similar contributions from the students of other Mennonite colleges.

In the near future the BULLETIN will contain an article on the history of the Forks congregation, near Middlebury, Indiana, of the Indiana-Michigan Conference. The editors welcome similar studies of other congregations.

In the BULLETIN of April, 1940, and repeated in the issue of April, 1941, a request was made for information of any person who has done research in the history of the Sensenig family. Bishop Noah H. Mack, New Holland, Pa., has supplied this information. He reports that research in the history of that family has been made by Barton Sensenig, 201 W. Mt. Pleasant Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

Recent new members enrolled in the Mennonite Historical Association are the following: Harry M. Nolt, R. D. 1, Bareville, Pa.; Reynold Weinbrenner, North Newton, Kansas; I. Erwin Yothers, R. D. 2, Perkasie, Pa.; Esther Weber, 324 S. Atherton St., State College, Pa.; Eli J. Bontrager, R. R. 2, Box 70, Shipshewana, Indiana; Jesse D. Hartzler, Wellman, Iowa; Chester K. Lehman, Eastern Mennonite School, Harrisonburg, Va. We welcome these new members into our circle of readers and supporters.

The total membership of our Mennonite Historical Association has not yet reached the one hundred mark. Out of a membership of over fifty thousand persons in the Mennonite Church there should be several hundred at least who are interested in the history of their church and who are willing to contribute every year

a small sum toward the promotion of such interest among others. Help us to enlarge the circle of the Association.

Four persons, members of the Association, are entitled to receive honorable mention as sustaining members of the Mennonite Historical Association for the year 1942. They are as follows: Ira D. Landis, Lititz, Pa.; Mahlon A. Souder, Blooming Glen, Pa.; Orie O. Miller, Akron, Pa.; Edward Yoder, Scottdale, Pa. Each of these paid five dollars to the Association for last year toward the promotion of the work of the Association and of the Historical Committee of General Conference. We invite these and others to contribute this sum in 1943.

The dues for the year 1943 are due to be paid now. Before you forget about it, send your remittance to the treasurer, Edward Yoder, Scottdale, Pa.

MENNONITE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The Mennonite Historical Association is a church-wide organization of men and women who are interested in the history of the Mennonite Church and desire to help in the work of making this history more widely known. The Association was first established in 1939 by action of Mennonite General Conference upon the recommendation of its Historical Committee.

The Mennonite Historical Bulletin is published four times a year for this Association by the Historical Committee mentioned above. The first issue of the Bulletin came out in April, 1940. For the first two years it was published twice a year. Beginning with 1942 it has appeared four times a year. It contains short articles and reviews, a variety of news notes, historical facts and information of interest to the members of the Association.

Anyone desiring to learn more about

Anyone desiring to learn more about the Mennonite Church and its past history is invited to become a member of the Association and receive the BULLETIN. The membership fee is one dollar a year. The payment of five dollars a year to the Association entitles a person to be enrolled as a sustaining member for that year.

If you are already a member of the Mennonite Historical Association, will you tell others about the Association, and about the Historical Bulletin, inviting them to enroll as members and so help along in its work? If you have not already joined the Association, use the blank form provided below and send in your enrollment application. Do this at once, and thereby become a supporter of the Mennonite Historical Association and a regular reader of this Bulletin.

APPLICATION BLANK

Historical Committee, Edward Yoder, Treasurer, Scottdale, Pa.

Brethren: I wish to be enrolled as a member of the Mennonite Historical Association. Find enclosed one dollar to pay my dues for one year. You may send the Mennonite Historical Bulletin to the address indicated below.

Name — Street or		No.
Post office	·e	

